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to the educated middle-class, does not act as a nightmare to their primitive minds. How the sex-life children are born into, conduces to the benefit of the tribe taken as a whole, can easily be judged from the rough account that follows. 831 [842]

Santal children, as may be easily imagined from their humble economic life, sleep with their parents. The more affluent of the house-holders sleep on a *khatia* with their wives. The children sleep nearby. One may wonder how the short space of a *khatia* (width about two cubits) permits such a sleep for two adults, but the answer is, the husband and wife do thus sleep. The minimum age for children for thus sleeping near their parents was given as 12, while the maximum was fixed at 16. 864 • 613

The people being poor, the accommodation for sleeping is extremely limited. Knowing how even western sex-psychologists have asserted that there are few children who have not witnessed their parents copulating, we have every reason to believe that Santal children have ample opportunities of watching the primal scene in their parental bed. It is not a matter for surprise that the sex-instinct sprouts very early in children; of course the first manifestations are unconscious.

We have evidence at our disposal which shows that in a childrens' play named "Sakam bàhu jamai" (Bride and bride-groom of leaves), marriages are 864 857

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• 864 857 staged between dolls made of leaves. After the marriage-play, Santal children imitate their adult social life, have their own folk-dances and play at coitus, soon afterwards. One Santal narrated to us, "I have seen that during the childrens' game called *Uku Uku*, they play at hide and seek and hunt out others from the bushes. During all these, children throw themselves on one another. They embrace in a childish attempt to get out and this physical contact results in sex-encounters with consequent childish coitus. Similarly, as explained by another witness, in the juvenile game named *Mèròm mèròm khela* (play at goats, in which a goat is taken away by a tiger) and *Kaṇṭhaṛ Kaṇṭhaṛ* (play at jack-fruit, in which child players of either sex take away a jack-fruit) there are physical contacts in tussles to catch the thief, when they experience conscious or unconscious sex-contacts.

Old Santals told us that attempts at coitus indulged in by mere children are very common. Very frequently male children lie on female ones. They also corroborated the fact that children have sex-encounters in the game, *Uku Uku*, and mentioned another game, *Shui Topa*, played by children with similar results. They added that children sometimes play sexually at baths and all such childish sex-encounters take place privately and never openly.

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Apart from this, there are other games in which children have their first sex-contacts. Thus it was explained that in a game played by children in water, named *Jol Kada*, a boy or girl blows hard at a stick and keeps it immersed in water. Others raise waves with their hands and try to drown it. The child who gets the stick, swims away with it, while others try to snatch it away. The boy or girl who thus seizes the stick has to grapple with his or her mates and this mutual clasping, hugging and embracing lead undoubtedly to sexual stimulation. Similarly, there is the water-game, called *thep* (Oriya, Phutkuri) in which a boy or a girl makes a sound in water, while another outspreads his hands folded forwards. The boys or girls who cannot produce the sound, become the thief (Kombro). The thief then catches others. Those touched, become thieves in their turn, and the clasping by throwing the arms round in the consequent scuffle, affords sex-touches for juveniles, leading not unoften to attempts at juvenile cohabitation amongst the nude and semi-nude players. We gathered that sex-encounters of children are very common in fields while they tend cows or buffaloes, and the minimum age for such children was given as four to five.

In course of our enquiry, we could not come across any definite sexual entertainment of children as "Cow and Bull," "Cock and Hen," "Horse and

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Mare," played with a wealth of detail as noted by Father Elwin in his "The Baiga." The juvenile games, indulged in by Santal children, resulting in sex-contacts and childish coitus are done openly. But, as Santal parents interfere in such games and chide the children while playing sexually, coitus is sometimes secretly indulged in. So it is that some Santals told us that children play sex-games privately and not before public gaze.

We should note that there are further equipments to the phallic knowledge of the Santals other than occasional glimpses of parental coitus or coitus generally seen after the Lagre*n* dances. A well-informed Santal told us that *Gòṛòmbaba*, (the grandfather of Santal children), the *teñae* (brother-in-law) or the Kumañ (father's sister's husband) explain the mysteries of sex to children of four to five years of age with occasional demonstration of process how to indulge in coitus. There are various other ways of initiation. Boys and girls sometimes understand the mysteries on mutual consultation about the supreme fact. Sometimes, old women teach the art to young girls and elder men to inexperienced lads. Even elder women, according to reliable testimony, belonging of course to the *rànḍi* (widow) and *chardi* (divorcee) class, teach the art to boys of 14 and 15. But to sexually inexperienced boys, the *guru* par excellence is the *bili* (elder brother's wife) with

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whom sexual intimacies are permitted or connived at in Santal customary law. There is a folk-song (quoted later) of the Santals, a Bir Sereñ (song during hunting) in which such a sister-in-law is explaining the mysteries of cohabitation to her novice husband's younger brother. Another song, also referring to intimacies with the elder brother's wife, perhaps records a second stage when the lad has become emboldened:

Koṛa: Dèsè hili ho koṛam toa te,
Tidò hili ho rakap' tiñ me.
Kuṛi: Tidò babu jaiñ rakap' ketamge
Pale babu ja sakòm saḍe tiñ,
Pale babu ja paini saḍe tiñ,
Pale babu ja dadam babu ja
Dadam babu jae dhòra laṅ.
Koṛa: Bàndi huṛu baṅse hili ho
Saika huṛu baṅse hili ho
Dadaiñ hili ho chindoè ñelà ho.

(Translated)

Boy: O, sister-in-law, do please put my hand on your breasts (on the chest) O, sister-in-law (please) raise my hand.

Girl: O boy, I could put your hand on my breasts,
But should my bracelets ring by chance?
If my anklets ring by chance?
If by chance, your brother catches us, O boy!
If by chance, your brother catches us?
(What will happen then?)

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Boy: It is not paddy, tied in a cloth,
Or paddy stored in baskets, O dear;
What will be the sign to know things from?

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There is, however, no customary initiation into the mysteries of sex, as making the boys "*bunsiar*" noted by Father Elwin in the case of the Baiga, or "Chalak kora" as one hears in Birbhum rural parlance, when boys are said to be sent to fairs to be sexually experienced.

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Added to all these, there is the undisputed fact that boys and girls are used by young men and women freely in their love-affairs and intrigues as mediums to send presents of *handia* (rice-beer) to the lover or *ukhra* (fried paddy) or articles of toilet to the beloved. Very frequently, children thus act as go-betweens in adult love-making and become very helpful in the conduct of affairs in hills and jungles, and naturally enough, as they grow up, they (children) get accustomed to love themselves and come to relish the flavour of such adventures.

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It will be clear from the above, how the sex-instinct is developed in children and, although, in the dawn, the manifestations are more or less unconscious, sexual consciousness is in the way of development as an active factor in the boy or girl's psychic make-up. We questioned a number of Santals as to the average age when sexual consciousness of children develops into a factor to be reckoned

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with. Some gave the age for male children at 6 to 7 years, while others were variously disposed and placed the age at 8, 10 and 11 years. The approximate age given for female children also varied from 8 to 14 years. At this period, boys and girls display signs of restiveness and want to frequent the dances, specially "Lagren", the moon-light mixed dance.

On attaining puberty, girls become very afraid of menstrual blood. But this dread has no particular superstition attached to it; it is merely the reaction of a mere girl to a strange physiological change in her system. An educated Santal told us that girls are asked to observe ceremonial uncleanliness for a period and required not to touch pitchers, nor are they allowed to enter places of worship. But this was not corroborated by others. This throws light on the influences of Hindu ideas and practices on the present-day Santals. Village-elders were definite that there is no ceremony whatsoever with puberty. While under menstruation, girls wear a *kupni* ("a narrow strip of cloth passing between the thighs, and stuck into a waist-string before and behind, to conceal the privy parts" – Dr. Campbell), but after three or four days, they cease wearing it. They can touch anything and no peculiar dress or sign is worn by girls to signify that they have attained puberty. The weight of evidence at our disposal

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882 goes to show that girls now lose considerable freedom
881 of movement. They are watched by their parents with care and are given companions while going to jungles to gather wood or to the *hats* for marketing. In support of the proposition that young girls are haunted by wakeful eyes, the following song may
[538] be usefully quoted here:—A girl sings:
[539]

Kidiñ tundañ lekayom horasien
Baha barge yoiñ bòlò lendò;
Hiliñ geto yoiñ eger kidiñ
Mone baric' yoiñ bòlò lendò.

(Translated)

(To look) Like a scorpion, I parted my hair;
I entered the flower-garden.
My sister-in-law rebuked me,
My mind became sorrowful, as my sister-in-law rebuked me.

•864 As regards the age in which boys and girls receive their first sexual experience, the opinion of the Santals questioned on the point varied. Some put it at 14/15 years with boys who attain puberty, while for girls they gave the age at 12/13 "when the breasts ripen," as they put it. Others, put it at 16/17 with males and 13/14 with females. Two educated Santals questioned at different places stated that boys and girls receive their first experience at 10/12 and 9/10 years respectively.

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When news of the sex-experiences of youths and maids reaches the ears of their parents, they are sometimes rebuked. The mother warns the girl of untoward consequences and the boy's father may look for a bride for his son. But generally, as an educated Santal told us, the parents of boys do not bother very much about these things and treat the escapades as lightly as a dance or a drink. 864

Women and sex-life

With abundant facilities for social intercourse with men, it is but natural that women's sex-life should take the hetero-sexual turn early in their lives. But any description of Santal women s love-life will be incomplete without reference to their early friendships with members of their own sex. The society, we have already seen in our chapter of "Kinship Organisation" (page 149) favours the formation of artificial relationships like *Phul patao, Kuramdiar, Kiya Phul* between girls, in which there is, very frequently, a strong emotional basis. Such 'flames' eat together, talk together and even sleep together, if possible. Sex-psychologists will readily ascribe a homo-sexual background for such attractions, when lovers of the same sex swear eternal fidelity in friendship till death do them part. Such friendships are almost rituals with some Santals, but it will be very difficult to trace any case of perversion 572 572 838